

A SPIRITUAL REVIEW FOR SISTERS



SPONSA REGIS

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WHY NOT STRAIGHT TO HEAVEN?

IN Review for Religious for July 15, 1950, there is a book review by Father A. Klaas, S.J., of Martin A. Jugie's work entitled *Purgatory* (published by The Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland). I quote two sentences from that brief review: "In it, Father Martin Jugie, a theologian of high repute, presents and explains the Catholic doctrine in simple, clear language, but with theological exactitude and above all with reserve, especially on the delicate subject of private revelations. . . . He might have developed more at length the theologically well-founded, though not certain, doctrine of the immediate entry into heaven of those who receive the Sacrament of Extreme Unction betimes and with the proper dispositions."

In the fine book mentioned Father Jugie tells us, among other things, that an excellent means of attaining salvation and of anticipating one's Purgatory is to embrace the religious life, the life of perfection. He says that the perfect need have no fear of Purgatory. Nothing can prevent their entrance into Heaven. He then goes on (p. 137):

"You will answer, perhaps, that before embracing such a life, a person may have committed grave faults — even crimes: for there are always the workers who come at the eleventh hour. Will not a past like that merit some sojourn in Purgatory? The answer to this is, that according to the opinion of theologians, the religious profession, by which a soul devotes itself entirely to the service of God, is a perfect holocaust and is every bit as efficacious as Baptism¹ for the cleansing of all sin and of the debt of sin. It is the equivalent of an act of most perfect charity, which entirely purifies the soul of the professed and gives to it its first innocence. We take for granted, of course, that he who consecrates himself

¹"Efficacious as Baptism," not *ex opere operato* in the way a Sacrament works, but in virtue of a perfect act of love and a total offering of oneself in the vows.
— EDITOR,

to the Lord, does so with interior dispositions which are in harmony with the sublime act of which the ceremony is the exterior manifestation. If such is the case, the religious need have no fears concerning the past. The day of his profession marks the beginning of a totally new life. As on the day of his Baptism, Heaven shines around him, and were he to die on that day, Heaven would be immediately opened to him.

"Begun with an act of perfect charity, the whole life of a religious, truly faithful to the spirit of his vocation and to the new obligations which he has contracted, is a continuous act of perfect charity. Having given himself wholly to God, he continues that giving at every moment of his life. His life of charity grows as from its dawn to the fullness of its noon.

"But where is such an ideal religious to be found? . . . But suppose that the religious departs from this life with serious² debts to the justice of God, who is of course much more exacting where grace has more plentifully abounded. See the advantage of the religious life even after death. That religious is one of a numerous family of brethren, who will all aid him by their prayers, their sacrifices, their suffrages of all kinds. . . . We have established, therefore, that one of the great means of avoiding Purgatory or almost doing so, is to become a religious and to observe faithfully to the end, all the obligations of that state."

This is all very consoling. Likewise very consoling is the theologically well-founded doctrine of "the immediate entry into heaven of those who receive the sacrament of Extreme Unction betimes and with the proper dispositions." Such is the teaching of all theologians. To mention a few, — Noldin (n. 429) says: "This Sacrament is instituted as a proximate preparation and disposing of the soul, that it may enter heaven without delay." Pruemmer (578, b) states: "Since Extreme Unction is the immediate preparation for heaven, it should remove whatever interferes with the soul's entrance into heaven." Lehmkuhl (n. 715) holds that "Extreme Unction disposes the souls and prepares it proximately for entrance into heaven." Father Joseph Kern, S.J., expresses it thus: "Extreme Unction is the perfect healing of the soul with a view to its immediate entry into glory."

Yes, it is very consoling. But we must remember that, in order to enter directly into heaven after death, the religious must either have been truly faithful to the spirit of his vocation, that he must have observed faithfully to the end all the obligations of that state of life, or at least he must have received the Sacrament of Extreme Unction betimes and with the proper dispositions.

²"Serious" not in the sense of debts due to mortal sins, which deserve eternal punishment and not Purgatory. — EDITOR.

Abstracting altogether from mortal sin now and, knowing that if venial sins are not forgiven before death the temporal punishment due to them will not be remitted here on earth either, we ask ourselves what dispositions are required for the remission of venial sins through Extreme Unction. According to Cappello (n. 163), the true opinion or teaching regarding this matter is that Extreme Unction (1) immediately blots out the venial sins of the sick person who also has mortal sins, if he has at least habitual attrition for both; that (2) it immediately blots out the venial sins of one who is in the grace of God, if he makes an act of imperfect contrition for them which perhaps by itself alone would not suffice to obtain their pardon; that (3) if because of a defective disposition the Sacrament does not immediately forgive venial sins, it removes them, as far as in it lies, by producing the necessary disposition.

Why does it remove them at least by producing the proper disposition? Because the end of Extreme Unction is the perfect health of the soul. Hence it is efficacious in disposing and preparing the soul for the bliss of heaven. To do this it must have the power to remove all the obstacles that keep the soul from beatitude upon its departure from the body. And venial sins are such obstacles. Once such obstacles have been removed, Extreme Unction, according to Cappello (n. 167), has the power of blotting out *all* the temporal punishment due to sin (at least by giving actual graces to accept suffering and death with perfect dispositions of atonement). Thus the Sacrament attains its end, which is the preparation of the soul for immediate entrance into eternal bliss.

But suppose the religious does not continue to the end that giving which is a continuous act of perfect charity, or that Extreme Unction is not received, or is not received betimes, or that this "as far as in it lies" is not far enough for the forgiveness of venial sin. Or simply suppose the religious dies with unforgiven venial sins. Such a soul, despite all indulgences and, under the supposition, despite Extreme Unction even, would enter eternity with venial sins unforgiven. Since the venial sins are not forgiven, the temporal punishment due to them is certainly not remitted. Hence the soul is consigned to Purgatory.

But no venial sin survives the first moment after death. They all disappear the first instant that follows separation of soul from body; for once the soul in the state of grace finds itself in the

presence of God (not yet the face to face Presence), it strains towards Him with ardor and hates intensely all that displeases Him. In other words, in the moment following death the soul breathes an act of perfect contrition which suffices to wipe out all the *guilt* of sin. Immediately it is perfectly holy, perfectly turned towards God, filled with the purest love.

But there remains the *expiatory* chastisement fixed by divine justice. According to the best theological opinion, the *purification* from venial sins indeed takes place at once, as just stated, but the temporal punishment remains. However, the soul has no means of bettering itself nor of progressing in virtue. That is an impossibility after death, and so it must suffer for love the just punishments which its sins have merited. But others can diminish its sufferings, shorten them, cancel them, by the adorable Sacrifice of the Mass, by indulgences, prayers, good works. "At least you, my friends!"

How much better, had that soul sincerely repented of its sins during life! Then they would have been forgiven. And then, through the Mass, the Sacraments, good works, prayers and indulgences, the temporal punishment would have been remitted too and the soul would have gone straight to heaven.

The evident conclusion to be drawn from all the above would seem to be that religious who are in Purgatory are there because they died with an unpaid debt of punishment due to sin, with unforgiven venial sins upon the soul, venial sins for which they were not truly sorry, which they were not sincerely determined to avoid, which they did not wish to give up, for which they had an affection.

We do indeed know that outside the Sacrament of Penance venial sins can be remitted either through some pious movement of grace or charity opposed to them, through other Sacraments, such as the Holy Eucharist and Extreme Unction, or by means of the sacramentals; but in all cases there must always be some repentance in order that venial sins may be forgiven. There must be sorrow for the sins committed. The act of sorrow must be at least virtual, by which the sinner gives up his affection for the sin and wishes he had not done it. He does things that are directly contrary to the sins committed, for instance, by asking God to forgive him his sins, by resolving not to sin again, by making acts of virtue contrary to the sins, by performing any good work

with the intention of obtaining the remission of the sins (Cf. Cappello, *De Sacramentis*, II, no. 94, 1943 ed.).

Careful thought about what is said in the preceding paragraph will no doubt convince any religious of good will that it should not be so hard to be sorry for venial sins in order that they may be forgiven. The expression, "by making acts of virtue contrary to the sins," will give the reader pause.

Suppose the following (to select but a few) were the venial sins. What would be the acts of virtue contrary to the sins? Give each point honest and prayerful consideration. Try to arouse affections towards God. If the matter applies, resolve to make acts of virtue contrary to the sins.

You have been irreverent in church and before the Blessed Sacrament, or in the use of the sacramentals, such as holy water and the sign of the Cross.

You have brooded over your past sins and have half-voluntarily given in to the fear that they might not have been forgiven; or you have let discouragement take possession of your heart because of your frequent faults or your lack of progress in virtue.

You have been morose and melancholy, gloomy and forbidding, in the presence of others, thus making them uncomfortable, ill at ease and unhappy.

You have performed your duties to God, such as Mass, Office, meditation, other prayers, receiving the Sacraments, in a distracted, impersonal, halfhearted manner.

You have been disrespectful towards or concerning your superiors, whom God has placed over you and who represent God.

You have let your sensitiveness get the best of you so far as to lead to your feeling hurt and showing coolness towards others.

You have permitted detractions and petty tale-bearing to go on in your presence without an effort to change the subject.

You have attributed bad motives to others when you were not certain of their motives.

You have hurt others by your flare-ups of anger and impatience, or you have made cutting, sarcastic remarks to others.

You have led others into venial sin by your suggestions or bad example.

You have borrowed things from others, such as books, and never returned them; or you have given away small things that were not yours to give.

You have been slow and halfhearted in trying to banish bad thoughts and desires; or you have neglected to make use of special opportunities of grace and prayer when you were passing through a period of more than usual temptation.

You have half-deliberately made yourself indisposed by overeating.

You have been stubborn and peevish and openly resentful against superiors.

You have taken part in petty quarrels and bitter arguments; or you have carried and shown a grudge against others for some time.

You have shown envy of others by picking at their characters, by lessening their esteem in the eyes of others.

You have teased others until you made them angry.

You have been guilty of the form of pride called vanity by considering yourself more intelligent, more learned, more pious, more charitable than others.

You have been guilty of pride and vanity, of envy and jealousy, of stubborn self-will.

You have given offensive evidence of ill temper, of discrediting uncharity, of detraction in conversation, of disobedience, of unreligious and even public rebelliousness, thus injuring the religious tone and spirit of the whole community.

You have been guilty of rash judgments, suspicions, condemnations of companions and superiors. You have slighted them, made slighting remarks about them, omitted ordinary marks of respect and courtesy towards them.

You have refused to be helpful to others, and yet when others did not seem to contribute their share to community life, you have been quick to come forward with harsh criticisms for what you called their selfishness and neglect.

You have been guilty of wilful irregularities in external observance which were certainly very annoying to others; and you have pouted over well-deserved corrections.

You have shown disdain for the observance of quiet and silence, which even caused some to have temptations regarding their vocation in your community.

You have taken a stubborn and malicious delight in being out of step or rank, in being out of tune or too slow or too hasty or noticeably silent during community chanting or vocal prayer.

You have been obdurate and stubborn and hard and by your apartness and aloofness have made community life hard for all in general and bitter for some in particular.

You have given way to your too free critical spirit, to your worrying self-pity over (mostly fancied or exaggerated) slights and wrongs, to your supersensitiveness, to your habitual impatience, to your moodiness, to your planning to get even with someone; or you have been disobedient to rules that mean so much for the full flowering of religious life in your community.

Let us come back to the expression which gave you pause: "by making acts of virtue contrary to the sins." Remember that you must make acts of virtue contrary, not to sins of another kind, but to the sins which you want forgiven; otherwise neither dis-

pleasure nor the necessary retraction is present (Cf. Cappello, II, no. 95).

What a blessed thought that you can thus, by the practice of the opposite virtue, obtain the forgiveness of venial sin! You are sinfully distracted in prayer, for instance; you regret it and strive for greater recollection at prayer as a result, and your sin of distraction is forgiven, virtue is practiced, new merit acquired. You let your sensitiveness get the best of you so far as to lead to your feeling hurt and showing coolness towards others; you regret it and make acts of humility and show special geniality towards those same others; your sin of pride and uncharitableness is forgiven, virtue is practiced, new merit acquired. You were disrespectful towards or concerning your superiors, whom God has placed over you and who represent God; you regret it and make it a point to be very respectful towards and concerning those same superiors; your sin of disrespect or detraction is forgiven, virtue is practiced, new merit acquired.

It is thus that you can make practical applications as regards the venial sins mentioned above, or as regards your own particular failings.

St. Nazianz, Wisconsin

WINFRID HERBST, S.D.S.

THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST AND RELIGIOUS

(Conclusion)

THE concluding pages of the papal document, *Mystici Corporis*, contain a cogent reply to our initial inquiry, "What do you think of Christ?" They explain the positive aspect of our relationship to the Mystical Christ. A brief summary is sufficient here; but all Catholics are exhorted to love, prayer, devotedness and sacrifice in behalf of the Church.

1. We must "love this Mystical Body with a burning love that will enkindle not only thoughts and words but also deeds." To have "such a love solidly grounded and undivided," we must "try to live in this spirit of conscious faith," that is, "accustom ourselves to see Christ in the Church . . . (manifesting) Himself differently in different members of His society." Besides, our love should rise far above the ordinary levels of human affection; it must resemble nothing less than the burning charity of the Sacred

Heart itself. Hence, "we should look to Jesus Himself as the perfect model of love for the Church." To "imitate the breadth of His love" we must have apostolic souls, ardently desiring the salvation of all men. We shall not rest "satisfied with our being within this Body members one of another, mutually careful," but we shall be truly solicitous for those "who have not yet joined us in the Body of the Church," so as to effect their conversion.

Moreover, the breadth of our love should eradicate that narrowness of view and selfishness of purpose which too often characterizes Christian piety in these days, showing an exclusory spirit altogether foreign to the life of the Mystical Body and prejudicial to its interests.

"If Christianity is to regain its influence, it must recover its unity and social activity. The religious individualism of the last age with its self-centered absorption in the question of personal salvation and private religious emotion will not help us. The Christianity of the future must be a social Christianity that is embodied in a real society, not an imaginary or invisible one . . ." (*Modern Dilemma*, p. 110, by Christopher Dawson). This society, we know, is the Mystical Body of Christ.

2. To stand the test of comparison with the love of Jesus, besides being universal, our love must be active and devoted. "All who claim the Church as their Mother . . . have the obligation of working hard and constantly for the building up and increase of this Body." If "our Redeemer never ceased to labor unto weariness for the establishing and strengthening of the Church" during all His mortal life, how can we profess to love her, to be devoted to her interests if we seldom think of them and make no efforts to further them? How often has the Vicar of Christ deplored the lethargy and incompetence of us Catholics in painful contrast to the courage and resourcefulness of our enemies!

"Let us not permit the children of this world," wrote Pius XI, "to appear wiser in their generation than we who by the divine goodness are the children of the light. . . . Whenever they undertake to attack the Church of Christ more violently, We see them put aside their internal quarrels, assembling in full harmony in a single battle line with a completely united effort, and work to achieve their common purpose. . . . Therefore, let all men of good will *stand united*, seeking not themselves and their own interests, but those of Jesus Christ" (*Quadragesimo Anno*). But, how can this union in effort and objective be realized, unless all concerned are thoroughly convinced of its basic source and inspiration in the Mystical Body of Christ, unless they are well informed and persuaded of the reality of the *totus Christus*?

In another document by the same Pontiff, we find the following grave warning, more pertinent now than ever:

"When our country is in danger, everything not strictly necessary, everything not bearing directly on the urgent matter of unified defense, takes second place. So we must act in today's crisis. Every other enterprise, however attractive and helpful, must yield before the vital need of protecting the very foundation of the Faith and of Christian civilization" (*On Atheistic Communism*). Yet, according to a recently expressed opinion, "American Catholics are extremely provincial, although one should not generalize flatly. There is a disturbing lack of solidarity among us. I am not speaking of a kind of Catholic political or economic solidarity, for the Church is not intended and does not want to promote either. I am speaking, rather, of spiritual fraternity and cooperation. . . . There is not the force of interested and ardent unanimity, where fundamental moral issues are concerned, that there should be. Still again, the 25 or 30 million Catholics do not stand forth as representatives of a concept and a way of life unlike any other. . . ."¹

If this be true, what is the reason? Is it not because we do not possess a faith-inspired understanding of our membership in the Body of Christ? Is it not because we do not give the true answer, either in theory or in practise, to that all-important question: "What do you think of Christ?"

3. Furthermore, "Christ proved His love for His spotless Bride not only by His tireless labors and constant prayers, but by His sorrows and His sufferings, gladly, lovingly endured for her sake. . . . It was only with His Blood that He purchased the Church. Let us then not be unwilling to follow in the blood-stained footsteps of our King. . . ." Here, indeed, is the acid test of our esteem, loyalty and devotedness to the Church. The pains, privations and agonies of this life are innumerable and we must all endure them, willingly or not. How often do we offer them lovingly for our Mother, the Church? "There was never a time when the salvation of souls did not impose on all the duty of associating their sufferings with the torments of our divine Redeemer. But today that duty is clearer than ever. . . ." Let us profit by the unavoidable sorrows and sacrifices of each day — if we have not courage to impose any on ourselves — and "offer to Him our works and our sufferings, if the salvation of the whole human family, bought by divine Blood, is really dear to our hearts."

But, let us "love the Spouse of Christ as Christ wished her to be loved and as He purchased her with His Blood," not a distorted

¹*Techniques for Convert-Makers*, July, 1950 (Paulist Press).

product of ignorance, prejudice or sentimentality. It is unfortunately true that, since the defensive definitions promulgated by the Council of Trent in the 16th century, the hierarchical and institutional character of the Church has been emphasized, with the result that the truths derived from her interior union with Christ have been greatly neglected and obscured. Hence, in order to reinstate the Church in her true position of dignity and excellence, to rectify and clarify our concept of her as the Body of Christ, and "the mystery hidden from eternity in God," we must return to the sources of Christian revelation, i. e., to the Holy Scriptures, the sacred Liturgy and the writings of the Fathers.

In former articles of this series an attempt was made to combine and coordinate the doctrine of the Mystical Body with the Liturgy, and thus demonstrate how closely they are interlinked with each other. We have tried to make this fact obvious and intelligible to our readers, so that they "may more fully understand and appreciate the most precious treasures which are contained in the sacred Liturgy" (*Mediator Dei*). Yet, as Pius XII tells us, "it requires a diligent and well-ordered study, . . . a serious effort and constant practice to imitate (Christ's) mysteries," to relive them in the liturgy consciously and fruitfully, and thus participate in that ever-flowing source of Life and Light. Continued prayerful study is, therefore, not only helpful but necessary.

4. The final proof and effect of a real and ardent love for the Church is constant and fervent prayer. Following the shining example of our blessed Lord, "let our united prayer rise daily to heaven for all the members of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, . . . for her safety and for her happy and large increase." Let us be willing to forget, or at least curtail, our personal intentions and interests, so that those of Christ and His Church may have first place in our thoughts and prayers. May this be especially true at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass where the Mystical Body reaches its highest potency and the union between Head and members is most fully realized. For this purpose let us adopt the sentiments expressed in the following prayer:

O adorable Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, I offer Thee this all-perfect Sacrifice and I unite myself with this pure and holy Victim in behalf of the Mystical Body of Christ, our Mother the Church. Mayest Thou be pleased to defend, console, strengthen and sanctify her! Through her may all men come to "know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus

Christ whom Thou hast sent." Thou hast made Him the infinite Source of mercy, wisdom and holiness for all mankind. And since He poured forth all His Precious Blood on the Cross in order to enrich His Church with these divine treasures, we beseech Thee that by her they may be poured out over the whole world. In her, may all the members of the human family become the members of this beloved Son. By thus uniting all men in truth, grace and charity within the one Mystical Body, may she regenerate, sanctify and consecrate them anew to Thee, our first Beginning and our last End, so that the high-priestly prayer of Jesus, her Savior and Spouse, may be realized: 'That all may be one, even as thou, Father in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us, . . . I in them and thou in me; that they may be perfected in unity, and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and that thou hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.' (John 17:21-23) Amen.²

Brooklyn, N. Y.

S. M. C.

VISIONS AND REVELATIONS

IN our times of spiritual, social and economic unrest, we have to cope with a problem that seems to thrive and wax strong precisely amidst great crises, threatening upheavals and fearsome uncertainties. It is the problem of the *sensational in religion* which is manifested in strange revivals, in the craving for the extraordinary and in extreme fear. Then the tainted tree of human nature shoots forth all sorts of religious and para-religious branches. The problem is how to deal with these phenomena, how to separate the good from the bad.

One of the greatest living authorities in spiritual and mystical theology, the Carmelite professor in Rome, Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.D.C., Consultor to the Sacred Congregation of Rites, gives us a most important guide in his *Visions and Revelations in the Spiritual Life* (Translated by a Benedictine of Stanbrook Abbey. The Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland. 1950. 123 pages, cloth \$2.25). It is important in view of the greatly multiplying extraordinary experiences of both true and false mystics. Even ordinary people, faithful who have never concerned themselves with the higher things of the spiritual life, are suddenly thrown into situations where they have to take sides, for or against extraordinary phenomena like visions. And there is

²100 days Indulgence in the Brooklyn Diocese. Free copies of this prayer may be obtained from: Monastery of the Precious Blood, 5400 Fort Hamilton Parkway, Brooklyn 19, N. Y. Please include postage.

a growing attitude, which is not from God but from Satan, that the "mystic" is right and ecclesiastical authority (bishops, priests, superiors and confessors who may offer opposition or doubt), wrong. Examples to prove this are not now necessary. We refer the reader to the article of Monsignor Ottaviani, "The Need for Prudence," SPONSA REGIS, October, 1951. As one reviewer of the book says, "an attitude of prudence is not yet general."

The book is written for spiritual directors mainly, then also for religious superiors who must cope with "mystics," and finally for all who find visions and revelations very attractive. It will help the latter fight down that attraction and get into a normal frame of mind based on faith, doctrine and common teaching. The whole study is based on such accepted, genuine mystics as St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Jesus (Father Gabriel has written two other volumes on those two saints, likewise published in English by the Newman Press). From their lives and writings he draws conclusions and principles that must guide us in so difficult a field. Those principles and conclusions have universal validity. At the same time, they are direct and specific rules that are immediately applicable to actual situations and persons today.

We are convinced that it will be profitable to introduce our readers to this subject by presenting some of the important rules and quotations that constitute the wisdom of the book.

1. Visions and revelations, extraordinary phenomena, are not essential for the development of the spiritual life. They are not at all the same as sanctity and the soul must regard them as secondary to the life of grace, to faith, hope and charity. They are of a lower order than the theological virtues (page 71). Basing on St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa, the author says positively that "visions are entirely accidental phenomena, without which it is possible to attain to the highest mystical contemplation" (page 62). A warning is sounded in regard to certain types of communication given to the senses and imagination, where the intellect must judge: "here the human activity enters in, with all its liability to make mistakes" (page 50). The reason is well known: "exterior visions" may come not only from God, but also from the devil and from the subject himself (or herself).

2. Therefore, it is not at all fitting to desire visions and revelations and extraordinary experiences. The persons having them

must not delight in them, or pay attention to them, or consider them as favors, or be attached to them, or cultivate esteem and give importance to them, or act on them by building their spiritual life on them. To base one's spiritual life on them "would be a very serious mistake" (page 72). "Theology clearly demonstrates that it would be unreasonable to become attached to visions and to build our spiritual life upon them. They are not proximate means of union with God, that function being reserved to the theological virtues. Moreover, they expose the soul to many dangers of illusion which cannot easily be avoided" (page 91).

3. A considerable portion of the book is devoted to the spiritual director, what he must do, how he must judge. He must concern himself with the nature, spiritual structure and origin of those phenomena. The author does not restrict the guidance of visionaries to specialists. With prayer, prudence and a clear working distinction between religious psychology and spiritual theology, the ordinary priest can go ahead to guide them safely. The subject of visions, etc., is never his (her) own guide, does nothing about them without the permission of the confessor or spiritual director.

4. The soul which has the visions, or claims to have them, must be above all humble and obedient. The Church's authority maintains an absolute primacy over all private revelations. Hence a filial submission in faith and the constant practise of recollection will keep the soul from the dangers of illusion and pride. Only the strictest discipline will settle the soul in faith.

We conclude with the author's own words: "The mystical union with Christ which is derived from grace is of immensely greater value than a vision in which our Lord offers a soul the marriage ring. The vision is a symbol, a figure expressing the union; but it is grace that brings that union about. The vocation of the contemplative life gives a soul a mission more profound, and safer, than all the invitations that it may receive from supernatural locutions. If these have any value, it will be in so far as they arouse the soul to a sense of its personal vocation which, more than all locutions, calls it to a life of loving sacrifice in union with our Redeemer" (page 123).

THE EDITOR

JUSTICE FOR KONNERSREUTH

THE author of the recent book, *The Case of Therese Neumann*, admits her indebtedness to Dr. Waldmann of Regensburg, Bavaria, professor of Moral Theology, who for many years has been basing his views on the problem of stigmatization on premature and allegedly scientific conclusions. It is he who contributed to the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* the negative article on Therese Neumann, which like his article on stigmatization proceeds from an utter misconception of the facts underlying stigmatization. He reduces it to a deception and a merely artificial "appearance" of something supernatural. Professor Waldmann writes, "Unless it be a matter of deception, the 'strange appearance' is explained by the power of an extraordinary disposition of imagination." Similarly, in an uncritical manner, he rejects alike all the symptoms of true stigmatization, such as abstinence from food, sleeplessness, visions and gift of speech as "purely natural and psychogenetic phenomena. . . ."

As for the author of the book, she fails to make it clear whether she ever made the personal acquaintance of Therese Neumann, or whether she has herself observed Therese in her states of suffering and visions. Yet she proffers a sharp and critical analysis of the two-volume standard work on Konnersreuth by Dr. Fritz Gerlich, who over a period of several years had spent more than five months at Konnersreuth; in like fashion she deals with the very thorough study by Dr. Teodorowicz, Archbishop of Lemberg, who devoted many years of painstaking research and personal observation to the Konnersreuth case. On the other hand, she quotes freely from the work of Dr. B. De Poray-Madeyski of Paris, who apparently never was at Konnersreuth — just as it is an established fact that Dr. Deutsch, an avowed medical opponent of the Neumann phenomena, never was at Konnersreuth. . . .

¹A review of *The Case of Therese Neumann* by (Dr.) Hilda C. Gracf. The Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland. 1951. xix-162 pages, cloth \$2.50. The author of the review, Dr. Hans Froehlich, M.D., of Frankfurt on the Main (Praunheim, Am Ebelfeld 174), Germany, is Chairman of the Catholic Medical St. Luke's Guild. He is eminently qualified to write on the subject, since he himself has published a recent work on Therese Neumann, *Konnersreuth Heute*. In his book he supports at length the same views as the present review-article treats. The dots (. . .) in these pages indicate omissions of considerable length from the original German manuscript. In publishing this we do not wish to anticipate the judgment of the Church on Therese Neumann. — EDITOR.

Let us consider the instantaneous healing of the severe ulcerous bedsores of Therese Neumann. Graef repeats the very same arguments and naive over-simplifications, which have been convincingly refuted as often as they have been proposed. Still, regarding these large sores there can be no room for dispute, because the fact of their existence as well as of their healing has been proved beyond a shadow of doubt. No less evident is the medical fact that this kind of wound has been a perennial crux for medical treatment and continues so even in our modern age of therapeutic progress. The conclusion drawn by H. Graef, that it is precisely this angioneurotic origin of the same wounds which causes the disposition to sudden, quick healing, is untenable from the medical point of view. In the case of Therese Neumann there were deep-reaching defects of skin and tissue which in part exposed the bone; in fact, at one time the amputation of her foot was seriously considered. There simply can be no question of "superficial skin injuries," as Prof. Ewald and Dr. Deutsch (who never laid their eyes on those wounds) called them. For the existence and description of these wounds we can only rely on the testimony of such doctors and nurses as actually saw them and attended to them.

The fact that their sudden healing was visibly perceived only after thirty-six hours, serves H. Graef as further proof of their insignificance, since she writes that thirty-six hours is absolutely sufficient time to produce the missing layer of skin in a normal natural way. However, she arrives at that conclusion only by distorting the facts. In the first place, deep wounds of that kind, if they heal at all, do so in the normal course of events only over a period of months. And secondly, the aforementioned period of thirty-six hours does not correspond at all with the actual period of healing, but only to the time that elapsed between the changes of dressing. Anyone acquainted with the facts knows that the actual healing happened about twelve hours before it was actually seen; to be exact, it happened at the moment when rose leaves from the grave of St. Thérèse of Lisieux were inserted under the dressing. We quote Therese Neumann's own words:

"One night my sister Zenzel had applied another fresh dressing to my foot. The following evening we slid the rose leaves underneath the dressing. At first I felt no change. But after a few minutes I felt a strong itch at the wound and the pain was gone. I asked my sister to remove the dressing. But she had no time and did not think it necessary to renew

the dressing so soon. So I had to be patient until the next morning. Then, on removing the bandage, we found it sticking to the bedsheet because of the blood and pus. When my sister looked at the foot, it had developed a new tender skin of a bluish color." It would seem that Therese's own statement about the strong itch and the subsequent complete disappearance of all pain reveals extraordinary and significant facts, which no objective and unbiased evaluation of the healing process can afford to overlook. But these facts do not enter into H. Graef's consideration, inclined as she is to regard the healing as normal and natural. . . .

I have presented this detail more at length because it illustrates how Graef's book does violence to the facts, how positive statements of eye-witnesses are ignored and only the views of opponents cited, and how consistently it follows the line of not even discussing the possibility of the supernatural character of certain events. To refute all such distortions and tendentious judgments of this book about the complex problem of Konnersreuth would require a whole new book. . . .

Some other points now require our attention. I know Pastor Naber of Konnersreuth personally from several meetings and discussions which lasted for hours, and I feel in duty obliged to protest against Graef's statement: "Pastor Naber is the driving power behind Therese Neumann." These words express an insinuation and a discredit against a priest who is considered by others, who know him far better, as a saintly character. . . .

H. Graef makes much of the influence of telepathy as it is supposed to exist between Therese and Pastor Naber. But neither psychology nor parapsychology can ever substitute for the criteria of mysticism, because the competency of those sciences can never reach beyond the mere threshold of mystical experience. In a closing address to the Religious-Scientific Congress of Vienna, Professor Alois Mager (recently deceased) of Salzburg, professor of Moral Theology, had this to say (on May 26, 1931):

"So much seems certain to me, that the Konnersreuth phenomenon does contain elements to which there is no parallel either in dream consciousness or in 'medial' consciousness, as far as we know them. I am far from claiming that the Konnersreuth facts, reliably established as they are, exclude the cooperation of natural and 'medial' forces. All I want to say is that such forces do not, and probably never will, suffice to provide a strictly natural explanation of those facts. . . ."

A striking feature of H. Graef's book is the absence of any discussion regarding even the possibility of a supernatural interpretation of the Konnersreuth case. We sadly miss any indication of the profound tragedy of Therese Neumann's suffering, of her vicarious suffering which sets in high relief two vital elements for

the salvation of souls: the Passion-Death of Christ and the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist. An objective and unbiased criticism should of necessity take into account at least the *possibility* of a God-given sign. But mere dissection, rending asunder, and "scientific analysis" leaves nothing but a caricature, nothing but the scattered mosaic fragments of prejudiced judgments.

By way of contrast, let us consider the rich, mysterious and stirring Konnersreuth case in its totality, just as it presents itself to the eye of the faithful. There, beyond the borderline of science, beyond the limitations of human knowledge, beyond the pale light of human reason and research, we are confronted with the vast horizon of revelation and faith. We Christians believe in the possibility of miracles; yet we must not have a mania for miracles. Well do we remember the warning of Christ, "For false christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Mt. 24:24).

From the history of stigmatization we know that there did exist cases of human fraud and of demoniacal influence. . . . We must learn to distinguish between true and false. Christ not only warned against false prophets, but He also said, "By their fruits you shall know them" (Mt. 7:16). We are warned against a mania for the miraculous and against superstition; but we are warned also against a phobia of miracles and against the disbelief of skepticism. . . . Konnersreuth stands as a silent pointer toward faith, a bridge between the here and hereafter, a beacon of truth shining over all the world. It is a mute sign that the supernatural is a reality. . . . Here the mystery of the Cross, the mystery of suffering, is being lived and proclaimed. The most stupendous and unique fact of all history, the Crucifixion of Christ, and the stupendous and lasting extension of this fact, the Transsubstantiation of bread and wine through the instrumentality of His Church — these two are being made visible, in effect, in a human body through the stigmata of Therese Neumann and her total abstinence from food and drink. Here a generation of unbelievers and skeptics is faced with the living fact that a human person can live solely by the power of the Holy Eucharist. Konnersreuth is a sign (preamble) of faith given to a world that is on the verge of suffocating from agnosticism. Stigmatization is a sign of suffering, a challenge to face the real meaning of suffering in a world where

suffering superabounds. A farm girl, Therese Neumann, gives the answer: voluntary vicarious suffering in the spirit of penance and atonement, in a holy, heroic and boundless love of God and neighbor.

At Konnersreuth we are witnessing a work of transcending power and historical importance. God does not give His signs in vain. The mighty of the world, who are enthroned in their Babylonian tower of ascendancy, engaged in seemingly productive activities — by this sign shall they be confounded. But all those who in apparent passivity and helplessness carry the Cross of Christ in faith, hope and charity — they shall be lifted up and comforted at this sign. To carry the Cross in following Christ is the "folly" of the genuine Christian; it is the only real, effective work in the making of history and in the essential task of building up God's Kingdom. This truth of the Cross reveals the ultimate meaning of Konnersreuth. In it we see, as in a sign of His love, the divine guidance and providence operating in the very midst of apocalyptic tribulation and darkness through which mankind is passing in our day. Can it be said that mankind has heeded this sign of God, or has comprehended this warning appeal for penance? The terrible, chaotic condition of Germany and of the whole world gives the unmistakable answer. Far from heeding the call to penance and atonement, the world seems to stand on the brink of a truly satanic age. Everywhere one sees the signs and fruits of its evil spirit: hatred and lying, arrogance and selfishness, anguish and despair, immorality and chaos. . . .

Nevertheless, mankind seems stricken with a strange inability to learn from history. Men pride themselves for their powers of hearing and seeing and of discernment, but they fail to draw conclusions for themselves. That is the story of Christian mysticism in past ages, and Konnersreuth promises to share the same lot. Its lesson is drowned in the world's noise and the bustle of the masses, while some others fall over tiny pebbles as over stumbling-blocks of scandal. Did not Christ say, "We speak of what we know and we bear witness of what we have seen, and our witness you do not receive" (John 3:11)?

No official pronouncement of the Church on Therese Neumann will be forthcoming during her lifetime. In such cases the Church exercises a careful reserve. The perennial presence of supernatural signs in the Church of Christ is an integral part of revelation and faith; yet, on the

other hand, no individual case does or can claim to bind us with divine faith. Pope Pius XI was himself very accurately informed on the Konnersreuth phenomena. Twice he delegated Father Gemelli, Rector of the University of Milan, to visit Therese Neumann (on March 23 and April 6, 1928, the latter being the occasion of her major ecstasy of Holy Week). Father Gemelli had been himself a physician and ranks as an authority in the field of experimental psychology. His verdict is plain and simple: no hysteria, and Therese's mystical states defy explanation by natural means. In connection with the Gemelli visits, Father Naber received a papal document early in June, 1928, through the Munich Nunciature, signed by Pope Pius XI himself, bestowing the papal blessing on Father Naber and Therese Neumann. It was on Thursday, May 3, 1928, that Therese in one of her ecstasies told Father Naber, "At this very moment the Holy Father is bestowing his blessing on us, on you and me." The papal document carried the date of that very day, May 3, 1928.

The Church is necessarily reserved and slow to pronounce in such matters. Nevertheless, it is a well known fact that more than thirty bishops from all over the world have taken a positive stand on Konnersreuth. . . . All of them take an attitude of reverence to the mystery of Konnersreuth and express their conviction of the supernatural character of this "sign of God." Pope Pius XI himself said, "We leave Therese Neumann to the guidance of divine providence." In 1938 he dispatched a precious relic of St. Francis of Assisi to Therese Neumann. These facts speak for themselves — and for the Pope's opinion on Konnersreuth.

All the more must one marvel at the conclusions arrived at in Hilda Graef's book, conclusions however which are quite understandable from her tendentious point of view and from her choice of sources. . . . Her capital error consists in this, that she subjects individual isolated symptoms to a radical analysis, instead of taking a total, comprehensive view of a problem that has so many ramifications. Furthermore, she tends to overestimate an individual "science" whose scope of truth is limited to reason and experimental knowledge. But science, in studying our case, may not restrict itself to the realm of sense experience. Any science which lacks the humility and readiness to admit the existence and the possibility of supernatural influences, suffers from a defective *totality* view. Such a science lacks integration with other sciences and the synthesis of God's wisdom. The wisdom of God alone can convey truth as a living reality. God and His "signs" cannot be dealt with in the same "objective" manner in which a mathematician handles triangles, or a physician heals a wound, or a

psychiatrist approaches the human soul. Naturally, we must distinguish between science as a method and science as knowledge. As far as method is concerned, no scientist can dispense with his natural channels of acquiring knowledge. But if we consider science as a body of truth, we must not forget that even the natural, acquired knowledge of reason is nothing but a faint participation of God's infinite knowledge of truth. And furthermore, if science omits to take into account revealed truths and powers in its explanation of causes, then it positively prevents an essential source of knowledge from integrating certain findings of the scientific process into an intelligible and living context. Seen from this viewpoint, "Catholic" science is not only on a par with, but superior to every other. Hence a revealed truth of faith exercises a much greater influence on science than a mere "negative criterion" (which, in case of a conflict between science and faith, would call for a revision of scientific conclusions), but it carries a positive normative influence, not as to the method of research, but as regards the very nature of the problem at stake as well as the knowledge obtained.

To illustrate all this need for a *total* and, therefore, Catholic approach to the problems bordering on both science and faith, I should like to pick out the phenomenon of Therese's abstinence from food. This happens to be also the most delicate of all the problems of Konnersreuth. H. Graef's book does not do justice to it. That only goes to show that a divorce of science and faith is ultimately unscientific, because anybody who carries on true and full scientific research on this phenomenon of abstinence, cannot help but arrive at the study and discussion of the same in relation to the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist. He will stumble on the fact that Therese Neumann does not totally abstain from all food: she lives from daily Holy Communion! It is Christ Himself who in the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist nourishes and sustains her life. Whereas normally the species of the Sacred Host (or the form of bread) and, therefore, also the life-giving presence of Christ in the communicant is limited to a rather brief duration of about ten minutes, in the case of Therese Neumann the facts are quite different. The Sacred Host remains entire and undissolved in her until practically the time of Holy Communion on the following day and therefore also the life-giving power of Christ who is present in her. This fact has been proven repeatedly beyond all

doubt through the emesis of gastric juices, yielded up in consequence of her mystical vicarious suffering, plainly showing the Sacred Host perfectly preserved after 8, 10 and 18 hours, respectively. Archbishop Teodorowicz in his book (page 332) writes about the mystical depth of this supernatural effect and its relation to the over-all picture of the Konnersreuth phenomena:

"In stigmatization the mystical presence of Christ in the most Holy Sacrament of the altar is manifested in a very intimate connection with the sufferings of Christ as they happened in the past, by the extraordinary experience and mode of Holy Communion, which results in total abstinence from food, drink and sleep." Therese herself relates the real beginning of her abstinence from food to Christ's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. According to a diary entry of Father Naber she declared, that "she had left all her hunger and thirst on Tabor when she had her first vision of Christ's Transfiguration on August 6, 1926." In Psalm 16:15 we read, "*Satiabor cum apparuerit gloria tua*," "I shall be satiated with the appearance of Thy glory."

Therese Neumann's abstinence from food, therefore, points forward to the body in its glorified state after death, when in the eternal union with God it will no longer require earthly food. Because of daily Holy Communion and the prolonged presence of the Savior, Therese is already living, in some measure, in the condition of a glorified body such as is promised to us all after the resurrection from the dead. The argumentative value of this phenomenon lies in its character as "sign." Because it is manifested as a sign, it must also be evaluated as a sign. In considering Therese's abstinence from food, it is of prime importance not to treat it apart as an isolated fact, but to stress also another striking thing, namely, that she is still subject to feeling hunger. She is subject to the inexorable laws of nutrition, even to the point of complete exhaustion, if it should happen that she must wait for the reception of Holy Communion a few hours longer than usual. Equally important is the fact that the reception of Communion instantaneously restores her physical strength, causing all marks of exhaustion to disappear.

It is nothing new in the history of mysticism that Holy Communion can keep the human organism alive for years and even decades. But the fact that this phenomenon, or as we would like to call it, this "sign," presents itself exclusively in Catholic mystics and stigmatics, greatly enhances its exemplary value. Here the whole Mystery of the Holy Eucharist becomes, as it were, tangibly evident. And so this "sign" becomes a proof of credibility for the

Catholic Church. Let us not lose sight either of the connection which exists between the Mystery of the altar, the Passion and Death of Christ, and His Parousia. "Do this in remembrance of me. . . . For as often as you shall eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord *until he comes*" (1 Cor. 11:24, 26). These three fundamental Christian Mysteries and truths are manifested in a living person as a "sign" for belief. No Catholic study and scientific discussion of the total problem presented at Konnersreuth can afford to neglect this interrelation. Those who fail to see therein the ultimate interpretation, nor accept that interrelation in devoted humility, go blindly astray and exhaust their energies in vain attempts of analysis, which can be nothing more than illusory and beside the point. Prof. Waldmann, for example, disposes of the problem of total abstinence with the declaration: "a puzzling absence of needs." Prof. Ewald, after fifteen days of controlled observation, conducted day and night under closest supervision from July 14 to 28, 1927, speaks of "a loophole in the observation." Other scholars say that Therese Neumann's digestive organs are adapted to a system of taking nutrition by way of breathing! . . .

These few examples suffice to show to what absurd lengths a so-called critical scientific method can go just because its starting point is wrong. That wrong starting point neglects to take into consideration the *total* reality under observation, which in the present instance means the supernatural world. We cannot help regretting that such a thorough study as H. Graef's book, in spite of her serious intention to search for objective truth, was doomed to failure. It is a pity that she succumbed to the guidance of an overcritical attitude, especially to that of Prof. Waldmann. Above all, we deplore that Graef apparently neglected to get into personal contact with Therese Neumann and that, consequently, she did not herself experience the unique effects of Therese's vision of the Lord's Passion. Only by entering fully into the complete milieu of this phenomenon can one penetrate to its heart and essence and so arrive at its ultimate just explanation.

As to the consequences of ruling out the supernatural character of Konnersreuth, the most regrettable is, I believe, to lose sight, more or less, of the sublime ascetical and missionary apostolate of stigmatics. If such divine signs have any meaning at all, if they are indicative of the manifest immeasurable love of God, then we

are guilty of neglect and omission almost beyond repair for failing to use and increase the grace of God under the guiding light of this sign. There is only one true purpose to the fact of stigmatization, namely, "It is a significant guidepost pointing to the innermost Mystery of Christ" (Hoecht). It is tragic that exaggerated efforts at interpreting the *external* framework of stigmatization, all in the name of science, are threatening to make us forget the core-content of meaning and its profound effects for the life of grace. Once again, Christ is raising His pierced hands, as it were, in a stigmatized member of His Mystical Body, ever proclaiming anew the greatness of His love by the manifestation of His pierced Sacred Heart.

"O Lord Jesus Christ, who when the world was growing cold, in order that our hearts might burn anew with the fire of Thy love, didst renew the sacred marks of Thy Passion in the flesh of the most blessed Francis" — that is the prayer of our holy Mother Church on September 17, the feast of the Impression of the Stigmata on St. Francis.

Like a flaming Cherub the figure of the great St. Francis shines as a protective symbol over all the penitent and victim souls of the centuries. Christ's road to His death on Golgotha was a way of penance, of atonement and of supreme sacrifice. And so is the way of Therese Neumann, "the living image of the Crucified" (Cardinal Faulhaber). There is no other road to salvation for the unbelieving generation of our time than penance. It is the sign which God has raised up for mankind, to recall us to the following of Christ in humility and penance. This is the one and only way of looking at Konnersreuth, be the spectators lay or medical. There is no other approach to this "sign" of God, which will always defy analysis of its true meaning, unless we approach it with the humble readiness of a believing heart.

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Frankfurt am Main, Germany

LIBRARY NOTES

RELIGIOUS SISTERS, Being the English Version of *Directoire des Supérieures* and *Les Adaptations de la Vie Religieuse*. The Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland. 1950. Pp. xii-313. \$3.50.

Many a religious will "rise up and bless" those responsible for this valuable book (in spite of its title!). It is a compilation of articles by a group of French priests who believe that the religious ideal must be adapted to present-day needs and that such adjust-

ments, when rightly made, will not endanger the spirit of an Order; rather they will prevent it from slipping into a state of stagnation.

In proving their thesis the authors begin with a clear, practical exposition of the theology of religious life. These excellent chapters give a masterly presentation of the religious ideal. The sections which follow stress the fact that a superior's primary concern is the sanctification of her subjects, and they point out the conditions under which she can achieve this goal most effectively. Superiors will want to return to these pages many times for inspiration and suggestions in order that they may truly be the "living rule" in their communities. Sound direction is also given for the discernment of vocation and the training of novices which, if faithfully followed, is sure to develop a generation of loyal God-seekers. It is in the final section especially that specific suggestions are made about meeting the needs of modern life; warnings are frequent against adhering blindly to the letter of outdated practices. While it would appear that European convents have more to learn than American houses in this matter, it is nevertheless true that all religious communities can profit by applying the principle of adaptation.

Without a doubt this is a good book — one that leaves a person better for having read it.

S. H.

LOST BOUNDARIES

Mother of God, thy heart!
 Thy heart that like a limitless sea
 Moves in upon my own with **gentlest rush**
 Of Living Waters!
 Thy heart that like a beacon-sunburst
 Shines to me,
 All quivering outlines lost
 In luminous Christ-fires!

Where now the boundaries of thy heart,
 That curved upon and kept in Galilee
 One only love?
 One love, dimensioned as the Child within thine arm;
 A single love, as measured
 As the Cross!

SISTER MARIEL, S.S.S.



Be mindful \oplus Lord of
Thy Servants and Handmaids

Sr. M. Edwarda Garthoeffner, O.S.F., Wheaton, Ill.

Sr. M. Coletta Doering, O.S.F., Wheaton, Ill.

Sr. M. Humilitas Eitel, Oldenburg, Ind.

Sr. Mary Coelestine Mueller, Campbellsport, Wis.

Sr. M. Armella McCarthy, Hartford, Conn.

Sr. M. Germana Mevissen, Fargo, N. D.

Sr. Mary Walimberta Uphoff, Campbellsport, Wis.

Sr. Mary Alice Hodgson, Nazareth, Mich.

Sr. Mary Placida Stephä, O.S.B., Clyde, Mo.

who are gone before us
with the sign \dagger of faith
and sleep in the sleep
of peace. [Canon of Mass]

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